

August 9, 2020

Dear the Catholic Diocese of Nagoya  
Concerning The Week for Peace

## PROTECT ALL LIFE

From Bishop Matsuura Goro

These days, each pastoral bloc and parish in the Nagoya diocese is praying for Peace. Thirty-nine years ago, the Church in Japan started an annual Week for Peace in response to Pope St. John Paul II's Peace Message. This year, we celebrate the Week with the theme 'PROTECT ALL LIFE' pronounced by Pope Francis in His visit to Japan last year.

In recent months, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the world and Japan have seen many dramatic changes. Its effects are felt not only in our daily lives, but also in politics, economics, customs, people's relationships, and values as well. Amid all of those, there are some things we can recognize but there are also other things that can be lost that we cannot see.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. At that time, people were being led to war by those in power while their freedoms were chipped away little by little — and when they noticed it was already too late to stand up. We, living in the present time, should remember that in order not to repeat the same mistake.

An all life-destroying war does not come suddenly. First, lived relations begin to break down, freedom is restricted step-by-step, discrimination is normalized, so-called "enemy states" are blamed, the past is ignored, laws change, and increased armaments are justified. Such a gradual maneuvering eventually becomes unstoppable by making people feel helpless to resist. Normal people in their anxieties are duped by divisive rhetoric that sows hostilities. In that way, once a war is started, it is very difficult to stop, and not only humans but other living beings as well as the environment are destroyed. War creates a culture of violence, which deeply damages the state of society and the humanity of each person.

To avoid such a situation, we must first listen to the voice of God. In today's First Reading (Kings 19:9a, 11-13a), the prophet Elijah was running away from Isabel, the queen who wanted to kill him — and he came to hide in a cave. After a while, he came out to hear the voice of God, but he didn't find God in the gusty wind, the shaking earthquake, or the fierce fire. Afterward, he heard the voice of God quietly whispering in a breeze. Now, even if we are worried about virus infection or about tension with neighboring countries, letting them stir up noise in our mind only prevents us from hearing God's voice. So, what can we do to hear the voice of God?

To hear the voice of God concretely means we listen to those who are particularly weak, who are suffering the most while touching the thoughts of Christ in prayers. Christ has taken their lamentations as His own, as He cried out, "I thirst" on the Cross. When we say weak people, we do not mean only those who are living now, but also victims of past wars who died with their human dignity trampled and who had no voice. In that sense, 75 years after the war is a good opportunity for us to look back at our history with honesty. Getting out of the darkness of our own cave and standing before God with such humility, surely we will be able to hear God's whispering voice.

The path to peace is definitely not easy. Because reality can be obscured by worldly desires that exclude the sane voice of those who want to protect peace. When we face such a headwind, remember that Jesus came among us and said, "Peace be with you. It's me. Don't be afraid" (Mt 14:27).

May all of us, supported by this faith, pray and act together.